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COMMENTS ON ROBERT HARDGRAVE'S PAPER ON TRENDS IN INDIA 1/1
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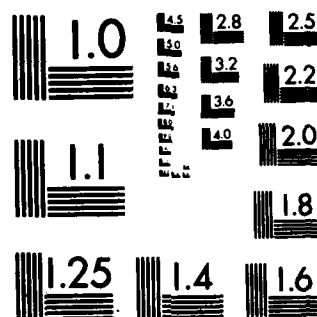
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October 21, 1983

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Comments on Robert Hardgrave's paper on
TRENDS IN INDIA

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Hardgrave's manuscript shows a detailed knowledge of many facets of Indian life; it is carefully researched and well written. It gives an excellent overview of recent developments in India. In each case, the three sets of projections for the future are plausible and he comes down on the most likely in a balanced, sensibly cautious but clear way. He is to be congratulated on an excellent piece of work.

A. On Social Change and Political Stability

(1) That it is still true that the monsoon and the rate of population growth are the most important determinants of affairs is a measure of just how far India has to go to gain that autonomy for choice which all governments aspire to. But for those of us who struggled in the 1960's along side of Indians to achieve 90 million tons of food grain production, it is a source of some satisfaction to hear that now 132 million is the standard plateau figure.

(2) In the study there seems to be a curious disjunction between the elaborated electoral analysis, which helps describe how governments are formed, and the socio-economic analysis,

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which underlies the whole. The latter is very well described, particularly the difficulties in Assam and Punjab, and to a lesser extent the class problems in the cities. Also the originality of Indian politics in the way disorders are used to bring issues to the attention of the top officials and political figures. On the other hand, the discussion of party politics seems quite distinct from all this, as if the parties are not in part reflections of these socio-economic drives. Are the two realms as detached from each other as Hardgrave suggests? or are they, perhaps, really socio-political phenomena that are observed and analysed by quite different methodologies, which makes them seem more distinct from each other than they really are?

(3) In this connection, Hardgrave might want to develop the notion of three ways of perceiving or angles of vision on Indian politics. They are shown in his paper, but he might want to make something more explicitly of them (a) electoral arithmetic - and his discussion of electoral data is first rate and revealing; (b) personal politics and party tactics, where he discusses personalities, the shifting coalitions of personalities and the coalitions that form and reform in efforts to form governments, and (c) the socio-economic grievances and issues on the basis of which large numbers of voters and political activists are presumably mobilized, either for voting behavior or for direct action.

(4) The analysis of the difficulties of Congress governance is very good, I thought. It sounds to me like a paradigm

of (a) party erosion, (b) bureaucracy growing in importance but becoming less capable, (c) a governing process of almost magician-like qualities required of a Prime Minister who does not have the party apparatus her father had, (d) a style of governance which Rajiv can't possibly handle, (e) but no national figure exists to take her place except perhaps Chavan, (f) a pace of change in at least certain areas which is bound to be destabilizing because the gains from change are experienced differentially. (g) We will also see the "regionalization of politics" pushing the system centrifugally, with a weak need center.

Yet, the argument in the conclusion to this section on Political Stability can be summarized - perhaps a caricature: things will go along much as they have been. That is my instinct, too. But has Hardgrave sufficiently explained why that is a likely outcome, given all the above (and other) observations that could lead to deterioration?

(5) Hardgrave might want to consider developing a bit two contrasting models, the "inter-state high intensity bargaining model" and the "Robber-baron economy" model. The first would stress the likelihood that as the Center weakens, the states will become more intensely competitive - like California and Colorado over water. All sorts of scarcities, with a weak political center could produce this one. The Robber Baron model might emerge more markedly as the central political structure weakened and the bureaucracy become increasingly buyable in cer-

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tain states, where entrepreneurial energies were most marked and local politicians joined with bigger entrepreneurs to push rapid economic growth on exploitative terms. But if there were jobs there (and not elsewhere), then they might be able to get away with it. It might do the economy much good, but offend the sensibilities of the social democratic, equity people. Perhaps this is so implausible as to not be worth much time; but it just might be.

(6) Considering this document as intended for the bureaucratic wars, do you really want it to come out the way it seems in reference to political stability? It seems to say: "After all this analysis, and after taking everything into account, I conclude that not much will change. Leaders may be different, but that won't make much difference. Whoever comes to the top will do much the same as Mrs. G." It's a very bland, unexciting result. "If the paper is right," I can hear former colleagues saying, "then we needn't pay any more attention to India now than we have for the last ten years. Let us drift as usual." That is probably not what Hardgrave intends; and he shouldn't cook his judgments regarding what is likely to happen in order to attract attention to his subject. But he just might want to consider the likely consequences within the system of the way the paper is presently structured on this point.

(7) I have little quarrel with the analysis of both the socio-economic and political system. Both together suggest

there really isn't much we can do about either, which I think is correct. These forces have a life of their own that are beyond us to effect. So far as I can see Hardgrave's recommendations are familiar (a) easing resource transfers from multi-lateral agencies; (b) how to ease technological exchanges, (c) is there any way of accelerating joint enterprises, when American firms are really pretty cautious; and (d) any way of facilitating Indian access to the US market? Each of these involves problems we have with a number of other countries, not just India: (a) International resources are not infinite, and the claims on these resources such as they are are enormous. What special claim has India over the others? (b) Easing technological transfers has major difficulties, unless India is prepared to adopt the same measures and practises of places like S. Korea, Taiwan or Singapore or Malayasia. But India's way of doing it is always more complicated, time consuming, and costly for American entrepreneurs. Why should the US government accommodate India in these ways? (c) ditto; (d) everyone else also wants access to the American market. Those who understand India well have had to spend such a high proportion of their professional career understanding these matters that they often forget the wider context of America's involvement with the world. We tend to ignore how much simpler others make it for American enterprises; and also that others usually help us in some ways while India rarely seems to think of that as a possible way of encouraging us to help India.

B. FOREIGN POLICY

In general, I have few quarrels with the substance of either the socio-economic section or political stability sections. But foreign policy is more troubling.

(1) We have a discussion of foreign policy which vividly reminds us, but only implicitly, of the all-too familiar dilemma of American foreign policy vis-a-vis India. (a) Indo-Pakistan suspicion and rivalry still seems very great, despite the 1972 military "settlement." (b) Indo-Soviet friendship inhibits India from helping Pakistan cope with its new frontier threat as the Russians come up to the Khyber (figuratively speaking). (c) since India won't do anything to reassure Pakistan, the United States feels it must do something, and that, it is said, makes Indo-Pakistan rapprochement difficult.

This raises the question: Suppose the US did nothing to help Pakistan at this time, does Hardgrave really believe India would materially change its position toward Pakistan? On what evidence?

(2) US interest in the sub-continent certainly does ultimately depend upon the integrity and viability of India; and India's constructive relationship with Pakistan. To be sure, the sub-continent cannot be defended without India but whether India is ready to play that role can be affected negatively by what the US does or does not do. Can it, however, be positively affected by what we do not do? That is a question the paper

should address, I believe. It is in part because we have seen so few signs that the GOI will rise to the occasion that we periodically rush in. I agree that in 1980 we moved too rapidly, and did not give the Indians a chance to pull themselves together to responsibly face the changed situation. But there is all too little evidence since then that had we held back, India would have constructively moved to reassure Pakistan by any one of a number of steps India might have taken. Hardgrave takes too easily the Indian argument. It might be useful to take some of the BJP argumentation, which criticizes Mrs. G. for always responding in the same old way.

(3) Statements on p. 93 point up the problem, to wit, "the US has one foremost interest in the region, it is in India's political stability and national integrity;" and "the most credible deterrent to Soviet military action against Pakistan is Indo-Pakistan detente and a common commitment to regional security." All of this is true enough. But who among us really believes that India, as the larger state, will really make the kind of moves necessary to make it possible for the Pakistan government to believe that India would be supportive? Hardgrave is really proposing a gamble that reduced US support for Pakistan and a reduced US presence in South Asia will lead India to develop rapprochement with Pakistan and together they will build a closer collaboration to deter the Soviet Union (p. 98).

The dilemma is all too familiar. But it deserves a more careful exposition.

(4) Could Hardgrave elaborate a bit on why India has not been more angry, expressive or sensitive to the possibility of a threat from the Soviet intrusion into the sub-continent? Why is it that the United States is seen by India's leadership as a greater threat than the Soviet Union? Or so it seems in the writing. After all, one reiterated goal of India has been to keep the superpowers out of the sub-continent. But who intrudes most dramatically? whose shadow looms over the sub-continent? This is not to respond to our own annoyance, nor necessarily to justify the Indian position. But to take it for granted as the natural order of things without a serious effort to explain it short changes the readers - and the fascination of this phenomenon. There is no doubt no easy answer, but it would be helpful if we had a bit more explanation or guesses to make this more understandable. "Ambivalence" is a useful notion, but it is not enough to help us understand what options might be within India's - and our - reach.

(5) On relations with Pakistan, there has not yet been a good exposition of what Indian preeminence would really mean to Pakistan...what kinds of constraints do Indians have in mind? Advance consultation on all moves? If Pakistan were only left to itself, would it not come to accept the "realities" of the sub-continent in a way it keeps refusing to do? Is this new "reality," i.e. the preeminence of India, a "Good Neighbor" policy a la FDR toward Mexico and the rest of Latin America? or the

"preeminent neighbor" which took the opportunity of Pakistan's troubles in 1971 to divide the country?

(6) Hardgrave suggests we should "consult the GOI but not give Delhi a veto" on what we do. I have written such phrases into policy papers, too, so I know the temptation. But does such a formula really help much? Suppose the Indians say "no, don't." As I recall, they have vigorously and publicly objected to nearly every example of arms transfer, however small, even spare parts. In the end, they have come to accept whatever transfers have been made; but of course leaving a bad taste to the relationship.

(7) He might want to explore the extent to which a proportion (x amount) of GOI foreign policy statements are for domestic political purposes, designed to rally support for the Delhi administration and what propositions are intended as serious messages for the United States and/or the Soviet Union. No government is free of such activities. But a somewhat further analysis of this point might help the reader to put Indian complaints about us, and lack of complaint about Soviet behavior in proper perspective.

(8) Hardgrave's discussion of regional relations strikes me as balanced and sensible. Bhabani Sengupta's discussion of the "Indira doctrine" is well summarized. I wonder, though, whether there might be some discussion of the implications of this for the United States. Does it imply an increased likeli-